

Minutes of the Faculty Standards Committee, University Senate, 4/4/2016

In Attendance:

- Jc Beall, Chair, Philosophy
- Pam Bramble, Fine Arts [by phone]
- Preston Britner, Human Development and Family Studies
- Jack Clausen, Natural Resources and the Environment
- Michael Fischl, Law
- Elizabeth Jockusch, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
- Girish Punj, Marketing
- Sally Reis, Office of the Provost (*ex officio*)
- Del Siegle, Educational Psychology
- Lisa Werkmeister-Rozas, Social Work [by phone]
- Fred Wanjera, OIRE

Jc called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

The minutes of the 3/7/2016 meeting were approved, with no revisions.

Agenda Item 1: Free Speech and Civility Subcommittee

Jc updated FSC on his discussions with the SEC about their needs and those of President Herbst. The SEC wants FSC to create a UConn-specific, UConn-wide statement to take to the Senate.

Jc proposed that we send the March 10 working draft (“as is”) to the SEC. Debate ensued on a variety of points (ultimately arguing against such a course of action).

The remainder of the notes are intended to reflect key points in the discussion and guide the next attempt at a draft statement.

Elizabeth was concerned that the “free speech” statement was not strong enough. It’s important beyond being “Constitutional.” It is vital to University discourse.

Michael agreed. He also stated that it “wishes away” the issue of when speech is deeply offensive. How will we address genuine pain for those on the receiving end of such speech?

Lisa shared that offensive speech isn’t always part of intellectual debate or dialogue.

Pam noted that 1st Amendment protections have changed (e.g., “fighting words” doctrine) under recent Supreme Court rulings. There was a question of need to define terms (as did the Chicago statement, in detail), but that was deemed impossible in the short run.

The first subcommittee report had pointed to existing By-Laws language already in place. There was some consensus as to the need for a stronger statement on free speech, even when discussions are difficult.

Pam mentioned the option of a University committee option. Jc preferred the idea of following through on the charge.

Michael pitched why we should include historical examples. There are legitimate student and community concerns, and we therefore must give such examples.

Girish shared a statement he found from the President of Emory University that included expression of ideas, ability to dissent, and ability to protest as key rights.

Elizabeth liked the idea of some of Michael's historical examples, but also perhaps some reference to the current climate.

Lisa noted that, in an academic community, there are types of communication that can be difficult to hear, but there is a role for discourse. There are, of course, ways that are better and worse for promoting civil discourse.

Jack encouraged Michael (as an expert) to draft a (shorter) statement. Perhaps a Black Lives Matter example would be more locally and currently relevant?

Jc and Lisa, rec: University committee? Lisa shared some concerns about rushing the process.

Elizabeth, Michael, Pam, Brit, Jack, and Del would like to make an FSC statement and encourage further work University work, too. Jack would prefer to give the SEC options, rather than mandates.

In the end, it was agreed that Michael will attempt a draft, circulate it by April 7, and FSC will react within a google docs (or related) format by Thur., April 14. After that period of comment, edits, and interaction, we will attempt a vote to endorse a statement from FSC – to go to the SEC. There was no consensus on how much agreement would be needed (e.g., simple majority?), what would be reported (vote? dissents?), etc., as it wasn't clear what would emerge (i.e., FSC statement vs. proposal for a By-Law revision; recommendations for further University discussion, task force, etc.).

What would be in a statement? Brit's summary included:

- Free speech, right to protest, right to dissent
- Civil discourse (about one paragraph – examples, historical [esp. at Universities -- which Michael liked but doesn't have ready research to address] to today)
- Free speech is fundamental, but it's also important to recognize pain experienced by "recipients" of some speech (i.e., acknowledge the dignity of the person)
- Role of University in promoting free speech and encouraging mechanisms for civil discourse

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Preston Britner.